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John K.

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## SUBSCRIPTIONS AND BACK ISSUES

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Subscribe to *Animato*! \$10.00 (\$15.00 in US funds outside of US/Mexico/Canada) will get you the next four issues hot off the presses, before they reach stores. We've got big things planned for future issues, including a new format starting with the next issue - 40 8x11 pages, with more feature articles, news, reviews, and columns than ever before. If you're an animation fan, you won't want to miss an issue.

New readers will want to catch up on our back issues, too. #1-5 are sold out, and #6 has just gone out of print, but the following are still available at \$2.50 each postpaid, or any five for \$10.00:

#7: *Black Cauldron* review; Korkis on Walter Lantz; Richard Williams's much delayed, frequently-retitled feature; Grim Natwick interview

#8: Korkis on Bob Clampett; Saturday AM '85; Japan's *Urusei Yatsura*; Hasson on Porky Pig; Dobbs on Fleischer videotapes

#9: Will Vinton; Shamus Culhane interview; Korkis on Chuck Jones; History of children's TV; reviews of *19th Tournee* and *Starchaser*

#10: Feature reviews of Mosley's *Disney's World*, Adamson's *Walter Lantz Story*, and Culhane's *Talking Animals*; Segal on the making of *Brave Little Toaster*; Dave Bennett cover

#11: *Great Mouse Detective*; Ventrella profiles Mike Jittlov; *Star Trek*; *Brave Little Toaster*; Fleischer history; Mark Marderosian cover

#12: *An American Tail*; Saturday AM '86; Disney books; Don Bluth; Dobbs on *Talking Animals*; Dave Bennett cover

#13: *Animation Celebration*; Beatles cartoons; Claymation; Shamus Culhane responds to Dobbs's review; Brad Caslor cover

#14: *Snow White's* fiftieth birthday; computer animation; Miller on *Ewoks and Droids*; Norman McLaren tribute

#15: McCracken on *DuckTales*; Bastian on the *LA Animation Celebration*; Miller on Hanna-Barbera; Winsor McCay; expanded review section

Each issue contains more features, including our regular news, trivia, reviews, and other columns.

Order from *Animato*,  
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# IN THIS ISSUE

## 4 Animatorial

### 4 Fanmail From Some Flounder

Talking Animation Fans and Other People.

### 6 "My Intended Audience Was Everybody."

A talk with *Mighty Mouse: the New Adventures*'s John Kricfalusi on the show and the state of animation in general.

### 14 Here He Comes to Save the Day! (...or Will He?)

The first Animato RoundTable: animation professionals, scholars, and fans on *Mighty Mouse: the New Adventures*.

### 21 Betty Boop's Museum

Harry McCracken pays a visit to the recent Fleischer Studio exhibit at the Museum of Cartoon Art.

### 25 My Youth in Cartoonia

Bob Miller winds up his two-part feature on Hanna-Barbera history.

### 29 Koko Komments

Fleischer's Superman cartoons, part two. By G. Michael Dobbs.

### 32 Flipbooks

Thomas and Johnston's *Too Funny For Words*. By David Bastian.

### 35 Short Subjects

Our critics criticize *Computer Animation Show*, *Count Duckula*, *Wizard of Speed and Time*, and *Light Years*.

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*Animato* #16, Spring 1988.

Published at PO Box 1240, Cambridge MA 02238. All articles (c) 1988 *Animato* except where noted. Submission of articles and artwork is encouraged. They should be accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope.

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## ON OUR COVERS

Ta-dah! *Mighty Mouse* and friends rocket through space in celebration of our two *Mighty Mouse: the New Adventures* features in this issue. Drawn for *Animato* by *Mighty Mouse* Senior Director and *Animato* interviewee John Kricfalusi; characters (c) Bakshi-Hyde Ventures/Viacom International, Inc. (Background inks by Stephen Batory.)

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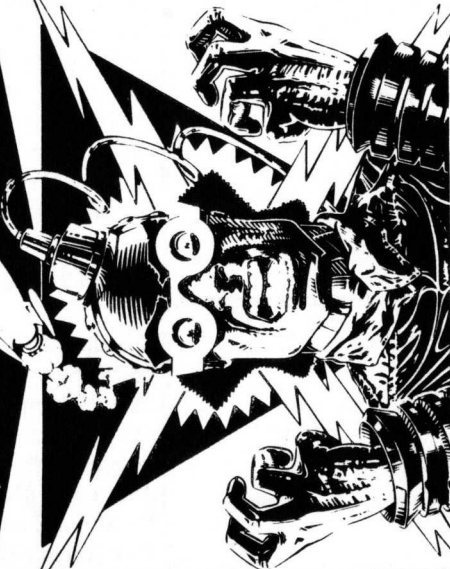


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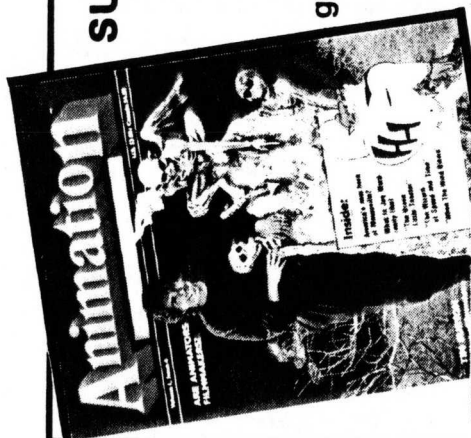
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# ANIMATORIAL

**A**nimato is growing, in more ways than one. The first is in circulation; with this issue, we gain three new distributors and a much larger press run than ever before.

The second way in which we're expanding will become fully apparent next issue: we're moving from digest size to an 8x11, 40-page format. This will allow us to bring you far more material, and will make us a more prominent and promotable item for newsstand sales. (You'll be glad to know that the new format doesn't mean a higher cover price or subscription rate for now, despite the recent postage price hike.)

It's been a while since we've run the *Animato* film poll. It will be returning next issue, so please send us your top-ten lists in the feature film, theatrical short, independent short, TV special, and TV series categories. We're also adding a new category for your all-time favorites in all types of animation. Absolutely every type of animation is eligible for this list: fea-

tures, shorts, TV shows and specials, rock videos, commercials, and anything else you can think of. It should make for some interesting lists.

Finally, we're sad to say that last issue's installment of John Cawley's Fox Report was the final one. John's job as Production Coordinator at Film Roman, combined with his activities with his own animation newsletter (*Get Animated! Update*), his co-editorship with Jim Korkis of a new animation magazine (*Cartoon Quarterly*), and John and Jim's mail-order business (Korkis and Cawley), doesn't leave much time left over. We're extremely grateful for John's contributions to *Animato*, which started way back in issue #5.

For those who particularly miss The Fox Report's news items, we heartily recommend *Get Animated! Update*, John's 8-times-a-year industry newsletter. A year's subscription is \$20.00 from John at PO Box 1582, Burbank CA 91507.

Harry McCracken

## fan mail from some flounder

Write to *Animato* at PO Box 1240, Cambridge, MA 02238

This issue's letters section is devoted to summing up the great Talking Animals and Other People debate. For those who came in late, the controversy began with G. Michael Dobbs's critical look at Shamus Culhane's autobiography in *Animato* #13, which focused on Culhane's coverage of his years at the Fleischer Studios.

(We had published Harry McCracken's more favorable review of the book in #10.) #14 featured Shamus Culhane's defense of his book, and last issue's letters section contained Mike Dobbs's response to that. The letters here are

the last space we will devote to the topic; even this interesting brouhaha has got to stop somewhere.

Dear *Animato*:

After months of dwelling about it, I have finally decided to renew my subscription to *Animato*. I would have done so much sooner, as I like it very much, but I was bugged by G. Michael Dobbs's negative review of Shamus Culhane's book *Talking Animals and Other People* in issue #13. Quite honestly, I'm confused by his dislike for

it. I am no expert on animation, so I cannot say if it is 100% accurate in all respects, especially in dealing with the Fleischer studio (which is where Mr. Dobbs seemed to get all tangled up). But it is certainly a unique and crisply written book, and deserves to be read by anyone interested in animation, and I think Mr. Dobbs should have said so. My only disappointment (one which will probably please Mr. Dobbs) is that the book is getting very poor distribution, and is therefore not easy to find.

I'm hoping readers will march down to their local bookstore (or library) and request that it get the book in stock, if it doesn't have it already, before it becomes just another "out of print collectible" available only at inflated prices. Buy it and read it. It's good.

And as for someone like Mr. Dobbs, who already owns it and has read it, well, perhaps he should read it again!

Chris Squyres  
Orange, California

Dear *Animato*:

Three cheers to Michael Dobbs for his reply to Shamus Culhane's letter. Culhane seems to have little regard for the Fleischer Studios...pointing out the studio's weak points and making light of its wonderful contributions to the field of animation. He also appears not to know the films he worked on under Fleischer. On one page he has a model sheet of Popeye in his white sailor suit, stating that the drawings are from the film *Popeye Meets William Tell*. Popeye did not wear his white sailor suit (as it had not yet been introduced) in that film.

As Popeye's 59th birthday approaches, we should owe a great deal of thanks to Max Fleischer for bringing Popeye to the world of animated cartoons. It is these films (and the many other series that followed) that have kept the one-eyed sailor in the public's eye all these years! Thanks Max!

Fred Grandinetti  
Watertown, MA

Dear G. Michael Dobbs:

On the basis of chatting with Ruth and Dick Fleischer and a few others, you

believe that you are an expert on the Fleischer Studio. As such, you have decided that I "have done a disservice" to the memory of the studio by being critical of the writing and drawing of the staff.

Thousands of hours gathering information and doing interviews is an exercise in futility if, having done all this gathering, you can't assimilate it and make a synthesis. Obviously, you don't know the first principles of drawing, so talking to Dick and Ruth would not make you an expert. The reason? They don't know anything about drawing either. Dick directs live action, and Ruth is a good writer of magazine articles. I doubt either one would want to be considered an expert on drawing. Yet you have the temerity to evaluate my carefully-studied analysis of a studio where I spent four years.

During two years of that work I was in the same room as Willard Bowsky, who was the archetype of everything I thought was wrong with the studio. He had no doubt that the cartoons he was grinding out were better than Disney's, and couldn't see where Disney animation was better than Fleischer's. At the premiere of *Gulliver's Travels*, he came out of the theater proclaiming loudly that *Gulliver* was a better picture than *Snow White*.

Also in the same room was Seymour Kneitel, a very hard-working guy who was derailed by the idea that, a director's job was to find some way to make footage for a minimum of expense. That was his main commitment. To a large extent these two directors/animators were the key people in the studio. It never seems to have crossed their minds that the work could be improved. When the Hollywood contingent arrived to work on the film, it was my impression that neither Bowsky nor Kneitel allowed a single new idea to modify or change the way they had been working. This in spite of the fact that many of their working methods were either outmoded or clumsy.

Under proper conditions, many of the people I worked with at Fleischer's would have become first-rate animators. After

(Continued on page 40)



# "MY INTENDED AUDIENCE WAS EVERYBODY."

## A TALK WITH MIGHTY MOUSE: THE NEW ADVENTURES'S JOHN KRICFALUSI

*Mighty Mouse: the New Adventures is something that you might not think a present-day Saturday morning cartoon show could possibly be: a source of delight for many animation fans, and the focus of considerable controversy. On the following pages, we offer two features in response to your letters requesting that Animato do something on the show. The first is this revealing interview with John Kricfalusi, the show's Senior Director.*

*Kricfalusi, a graduate of Canada's Sheridan College, has toiled on many Saturday-morning shows he doesn't think much of, from Filmation's 1970s *Mighty Mouse* and *Tom and Jerry* cartoons to Heathcliff to Richie Rich and Laverne and Shirley. He's more pleased with his work on the new *Jetsons* episodes and the Ralph Bakshi-produced animation for the Rolling Stones "Harlem Shuffle" video. And of course, of his work on *Mighty Mouse: the New Adventures*. Harry McCracken interviewed him in March.*

**Animato:** *I understand there are some misconceptions about the show you'd like to clear up.*

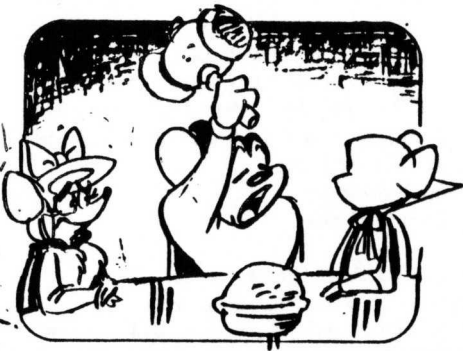
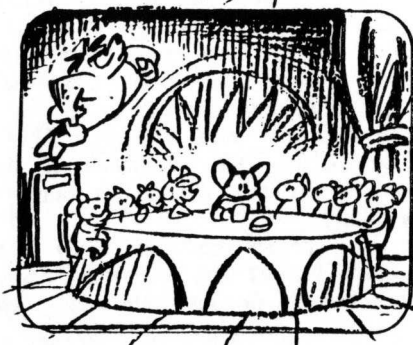
**Kricfalusi:** *Mostly in the *Amazing Heroes* article (issue #129). It made it look like Ralph was a director on the show, which never was...in fact, he had hardly anything to do with the show. He was the producer. He was the perfect producer. He sat back - he hired me, I put together the crew. I told him about the old Warner cartoons, the Disney cartoons, the MGMs, and how they all*

*did it. There was one director behind the whole actual particular cartoon who'd follow it all the way from story to the end of the picture. And he thought that was a great idea, and said "Well, that's how we used to do it too, back at Terrytoons."*

*Was he involved creatively at all?*

*The furthest he went creatively was in the first few weeks, during the stories. We would have to pitch all our story ideas to him, so he'd either like them or not like them. A couple of times, he*

*Storyboard drawings from the "Legion of Super-Rodents" episode.*



wouldn't like them, and I would fight for them. Like "Petey Pate." He hated the idea at first. And you know, it was a regular producer/director type thing, so I had to talk him into it. And in that respect he was great, because he trusted us enough that, "Well okay, even though I don't see this, you must see something in it." And once he heard the voice track, he said, "Okay, I see, the guy's really going to lose his cookies, he's not just a stock super-villain."

So basically, he was a sounding board. But once we got our stories okayed, we went ahead and did them. Elwy and the Tree Weasels was an idea that Bob Jaques and I had at lunch. On the way to lunch in the car, we were laughing about his experiences on the Bagdasarian picture. And I said, "wouldn't it be cool to make a cartoon about this!" So we started making fun of the Chipmunks...just a bunch of jokes knocking back and forth.

After lunch, I went to Ralph and said "Hey, why don't we do a takeoff on the Chipmunks," and pitched the idea to him there. The whole story was basically figured out at lunch. And he said, "Great! I love it!"

*So Ralph pretty much stood out of your way and let you go about your business?*

For the most part, yeah. He would complain about general things, like we didn't use Mighty Mouse enough in the cartoons. So we'd go back and put more Mighty Mouse in.

*You were intentionally trying to recreate the old Hollywood cartoon studio system with the units?*

Exactly. I've been trying to do that ever

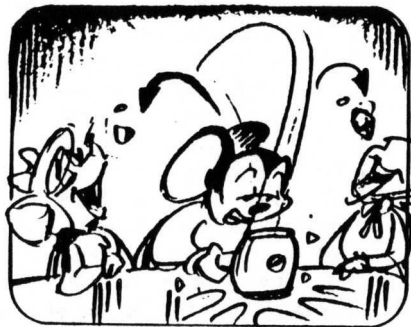
since I got into the business. As soon as I found out how compartmentalized the industry was, I realized, "Well, no wonder the cartoons are so bad." 'Cause it wasn't for a lack of talent. When I first came down, I was naive, I thought, "Well, they're going to welcome me with open arms, because there's nobody with any talent down there." And it turns out there's *tons* of people with talent; it's the system that's all screwed up. As long as there's departments, nobody talks to each other. The storyboard department doesn't talk to the layout department, which doesn't talk to the writing department. Each one of these departments has a department head, and they're all jealous of each other, and they all blame each other for all the mistakes.

Even the actual direction duties are split up between about eight different guys. One guy records the voices, another guy times the storyboard, another guy times the sheets., one guy is the story editor. All these jobs should be covered by the director.

None of these guys talk to each other. So you get a storyboard that has a pose on a character with some kind of expression, say George Jetson talking to Jane. And Jane's giving him shit about something: "Now, George..." So that's the line. Then, in the picture on the storyboard, they're just sitting there with normal expressions on. Then the layout artist will look at the storyboard, and he'll basically trace the model sheets. Because he doesn't have a soundtrack, he doesn't know what the

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*All Mighty Mouse: the New Adventures illustrations in this issue (c) Bakshi-Hyde Ventures/Viacom International, Inc.*



inflection is. So he'll draw her happy: *(repeats line with cheerful inflection)* "Now, George..." And by the time it goes through, you've got the wrong expression for the inflection of the voice. This kind of stuff happens all over the place, because nobody understands what anyone else has done.

*Did returning to the unit system solve those problems pretty well?*

Oh, it completely solved them. There's no communication problem at all with the unit system. But it depends on the director, too. If you're a lame director - and we had a couple of those who didn't understand why we were doing it in the first place - then they wouldn't talk to people.

*So the actual talent of the people involved made more of a difference than under the usual system?*

Yeah. Under the other system, everybody's afraid of bugging something up, so they take the safest, easiest way out: "I'm not going to do anything here that stands out." Because the other departments are going to look at it and say, "That's not what we meant."

Well, in our system, all you have to do is go to the director and show it to him: "Is this what you meant?" And he'll say yes or no. So there's no problem, because there's someone who knows what's going on in the cartoon right from the beginning to the end. With the department system, nobody knows what the cartoon's about until it's finished - then everybody goes "Oh, *that's* what it's about." This way you know exactly what it's about, right from the beginning.

*Was doing two short cartoons rather than a half-hour also an attempt to get back to the older short-cartoon format?*

Well, that was a format that they had already been using on Saturday morning...they do some half hours, and some two eleven-minutes. Actually, eleven minutes is a really clumsy format for a cartoon. It's not enough to tell a story, really, and it's too much to do a gag cartoon. So some of our stories were pretty awkward because of that.

*So if you had the ideal setup you would have gone with shorter cartoons?*

Oh, definitely. We were always talking

about doing three six-minute cartoons, and making a couple of bumpers to fill up the twenty-two minutes. But for some reason, it's very hard to convince the networks to do that.

One of the other things we did that none of the other studios did, was that it was an artist who hired everybody. I scoured the industry, basically, and got as many talented people as I could, all under one roof, which nobody else has. Every other studio has two or three really talented people in it. We took those two or three talented people for every studio, and ran them all into one studio.

*Did the group get along pretty well?*

Yeah, they got along great. Everybody felt like they were really doing something together. Except for, like I said, there were a couple of safe directors that were hired because Ralph was worried that the crazy directors would be irresponsible, which they weren't.

It was a real team sort of thing. People worked overtime every night - we were working sixteen-hour days. We just wanted to prove to people that it is possible to make a real cartoon, and keep it on a cheap budget. That was another thing everybody told us: "The reason you can't do expressions and strong poses is because it's limited animation. It won't work." And I always had the theory: "Why not? Limited animation needs strong poses even more than full animation."

*So the emphasis on poses and expressions and designs was made to cope with the limited movement?*

My style is very strong poses and expressions anyway, but I just could never figure out why people wouldn't do it in limited animation. I would do it anyway, full or limited. But with limited you especially need it, because there's nothing else happening. If you're just going to have them standing there talking to each other - well, what the hell is that? That's worse than a comic book. A comic book has poses in it. I'd rather see less inbetweens and more poses. Most of the studios, what they'll do is put a ton of inbetweens in a head bob. What's the point? Get rid of those inbetweens, and save some money. Put



that money into the artist who draws the poses. Let him draw some strong poses, and move them fast from pose to pose. It was all invented by Chuck Jones in *The Dover Boys*.

*How much of the actual animation was done overseas? Did you do all the poses here?*

We did every single pose. Every pose, every expression, right here, and marked them onto the sheets.

*Did that make it hard for them to mess up things overseas?*

Yeah, but in fact, they weren't going to mess things up anyway, because the team we had overseas, at the James Wang studio, Cuckoo's Nest, I had trained them about two and a half years ago on *The Jetsons*. I did the same system over there that I brought over here, basically. I did a mini-version of it. I was sent over there to supervise layout on *The Jetsons*, so I put a team together, and asked Hanna-Barbera to send me the soundtracks. They thought I was crazy. I could hear them on the phone: "He wants the soundtracks?" And here's someone else going, "Just humor him, man...He's crazy. Who knows what he wants them for?"

What I wanted them for was so that we could pose everybody to the inflections, which they thought was a real revolution. So anyway, I trained the guys over there, the Taiwanese guys who

*The Bat-Bat.*



can't even speak English to do this. I taught them how to exaggerate, how to draw cartoons basically.

So when we started *Mighty Mouse*, I called up James Wang and said, "Listen, we want to get the guys I trained back on *The Jetsons* to do this show." So he gave us all the guys, and they went crazy. They took the opportunity to go from layout artists to being animators. And with our poses all right on the sheets, we did half the animation work for them, but it still left them free to do a really good job.

Basically what they did was they broke it down, did the assistant work on it. But it gave them a chance to understand what they were doing, and do a good job of breaking it down. We sent them old films and stuff, and they did a lot of the smeared inbetweening that they used to do at Warner Brothers.

*All in all you're quite pleased with the work they did?*

I think it could be a lot better, but for people who've never had a chance to do anything before, I think it's the best stuff they've ever done overseas, except for *The Brave Little Toaster*, which was heavily supervised by Americans.

*You talked about Chuck Jones influencing the show's style...Can you talk a little bit more about the people who influenced the show?*

Well, my personal biggest influence is Bob Clampett, as far as exaggeration and drawing style go. Chuck Jones, Tex Avery...

*Were the old Terrytoons an influence at all?*

Oh yeah, as soon as we started *Mighty Mouse*, I wanted - I didn't succeed in this - I wanted to get the Terrytoons flavor in there. I loved the cheesiness of that drawing style. I love Jim Tyer, Carlo Vinci...But there's just something about the Terrytoons style that only those guys could capture, and I wanted to capture it.

In the beginning, what I wanted to do was hire all the layout artists a week or two early, before we actually started production, just so we could watch the old films and really nail the style down. But because of budget problems they

didn't want to chance it. Well, there wasn't really a budget problem yet, but they thought we were going to have budget problems. It ended up that we could have afforded to do it.

So basically, I printed off a bunch of stuff off the TV and made some model sheets from the old comic books that those guys drew. And at first, a lot of people were really worried about this. Some of the old guys that Ralph hired, some of his old friends that he hired to give them jobs, would look at the model sheets made from the comic books and say, "Well we can't use these, he looks totally different in them all!" And I said, "Yeah, like an animated cartoon! Get expressions in each different pose."

In some of the scenes we kind of got it, but for the rest, not really. I would have liked to.

*I hear people comparing the show to Bullwinkle a lot. Did Jay Ward have much influence on you?*

Not in the least...I'll let you in on a secret: I can't stand Jay Ward. Well, I don't hate Jay Ward. What I mean is, I hate being compared to *Rocky and Bullwinkle*. It's just a different style of humor. In fact, I love the drawing style.

I think it's a compliment to me, though

(being compared to Jay Ward), because what they really mean is it's one of the few funny TV shows. There just haven't been any, so of course they have to drag the odd one there was in. But you might as well say we were influenced by *Roger Ramjet*. It's a totally different style.

*Was Bakshi's other work an influence at all?*

No. Again, it's just a totally different style. That's Ralph's style, and he's the only one who can do it.

To tell you the truth, I admire Ralph personally. I think he's the best producer there is; he's the only guy who'll stand up for what he believes in. The problem is, what he believes in changes from minute to minute, and you can see that in all his pictures. I've never seen a Ralph movie that you can follow from beginning to end. There's something going on in his head that's not on the screen.

*Was using a character like Mighty Mouse, who's never been very interesting, a blessing or a burden? Did it allow you more freedom than you would have had making, say, new Bugs Bunny cartoons?*

I would never want to try doing Bugs Bunny cartoons. That could only be

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*From "Mighty's Benefit Plan:" Elwy and the Tree Weasels.*



done by the guys who did it. Especially since Carl Stalling is gone, Treg Brown...Mel Blanc has been gone for thirty years, even though he's still around....But yeah, you couldn't do Bugs Bunny. Mighty Mouse, you don't care. It's kind of fun to take a cheesy character and make fun of him.

Look at that Daffy Duck cartoon they did (*The Duxorcist*)....We could do a better job than that, but still it would obviously be a cheap imitation. But with Mighty Mouse, I didn't feel like we had to do it the way they did it originally. I didn't have to live up to a Terrytoon. We could just take the character and do something different with him. With Bugs Bunny, it would be sacrilege.

*Was it a struggle to get Mighty Mouse into the stories?*

Yeah, it was at first. It really took us a while, because we kept coming up with more interesting characters all around him. When you get a character like Bat-Bat, you just want to do everything with him. I think that was a mistake, too.

It just took us a while to get used to him. I think this year, if we were going to do it - I don't think it's going to happen - I'd have a much better handle on the character. I'd just make *more* fun of him. Near the end, when we were doing weird things with him, the way he was flying through the air like he was swimming, with Scrappy on his back...I think we were just starting to get the hang of it, to just make him totally living in his own world. He wouldn't be swell-headed, but just really into his heronness, but at the same time not seeing what a buffoon he is. I feel what the character is a lot more now than I did at the beginning of the series.

*I've heard that you didn't want to do Scrappy, but they told to put in a cute kid.*

Well, it's not that *they* told us. In the beginning, Judy Price said, "Now remember, Ralph, this show is early in the morning, 8:30, we need heart." So Ralph, in his own ingenious, blunt way, came up with some heart: "Let's put an orphan boy in." So we came up with Scrappy. I think if one thing hurt the

series, more than anything else, it was that, trying to write dumb stories around Scrappy. If we could make fun of him totally, it would be all right. But first of all, we were having enough trouble with Mighty Mouse, and then you had to spend almost half the time with this orphan kid...You've got nothing left for adventure, action, or humor.

*He seems a little too grotesque to be a really heartwarming character.*

The design, you mean? The problem wasn't the design. If you saw the original designs - he's cute, it's a caricature of Jerry Mouse. The problem was, a couple of the early directors totally bugged it up; they just didn't understand that design. Because it was a caricature, they would say things like, "Well, his head's way too big for his body. That body could never hold up a head like that." So they would redesign it themselves in the cartoons, give him this little pea-head, stretch his arms out...There were some Filimation people in the beginning that worked on some of that stuff, and they did this horrible, disgusting job on it.

In other shows, he looks really good. Look at him in "Witch Tricks." Some of the better layout artists drew him there, and he looks great. Or he looks pretty good in "Elwy and the Tree Weasels," when he shows up in the Zagreb section.

*Do you think the show will have any influence on Saturday morning cartoons in the future, or will it be something that just happened once?*

Oh boy, that's a hard one. In a way, right now, it's starting to make waves. It's getting good ratings, but not so much that it's an out-and-out hit. And it doesn't look like I'll be doing the show this year, because Ralph and I are having one of our yearly fights, and I think it's gotten really bad this time. And if he does it himself, it'll be just another thing worthy of the name "Ralph Bakshi." It'll make no sense at all. So that'll be the end of it.

*If the show does come back, it'll be with a new team?*

It will be with a new team, unless I do it. It'll be the old Ralph Bakshi story of the revolving door. You've heard all the





From "The Littlest Tramp": Big Murray and Polly.

stories, I'm sure, about all his features and everything. People walking in one day and, "You're still here?" And that's exactly the way he is. I was the one who stopped that, because basically I let him heap all of his abuse on me, rather than on everybody else, so everyone was pretty well protected.

*So you think the show would only have an influence on the way things were done if it was a hit?*

We'd have to keep it going. If we could do one more year, and *really* do it right, 'cause I think I know what are all the problems are, I think we could hit this season, pretty easily.

In fact, one of my complaints about the show is that it's not wild enough. It's ambiguous. You don't know whether it's supposed to have heart, whether it's supposed to be an action show, or whether it's supposed to be wild, because of some of the story problems. The ones that really worked, I think, worked. But there's only three that really worked.

*Did CBS interfere? Or were they supportive? Neutral?*

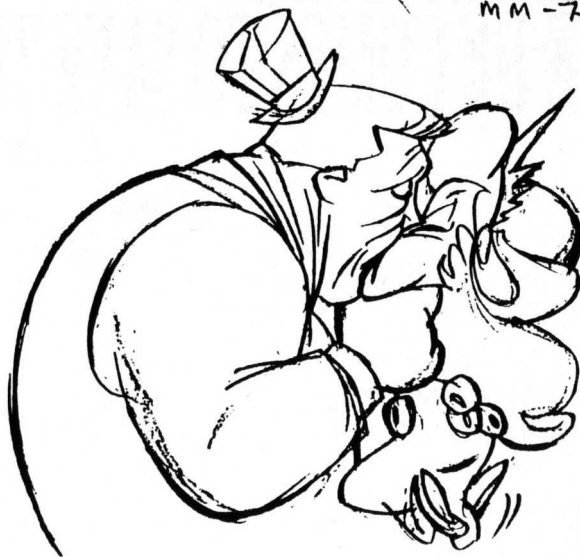
They *tried* to interfere, but Ralph kept them off our backs. He was great at that. They indirectly interfered. They'd say they wanted this, that, and the other thing, but then Ralph would interpret it his way and then have us put it in the

scripts and stuff. But as far as once they read the scripts, they didn't make much in the way of changes.

Some of the changes were hilarious. We had one, it was on "Bat-Bat." Remember the hot party where the udder shows up? They said, "Make sure that there are the correct number of teats on that udder." Nobody knew, and they said, "Well, how many teats does a cow have?" Somebody said four, and somebody else said six. So we put down five, just to play it safe.

They were really dumb changes. It was nothing like when I was at Hanna-Barbera, and you'd get pages and pages of changes. I have to give Ralph all the credit there. He just stood up for me. He's a pretty hard guy to fight.

It's what I kept asking the producers at the other studios all the time: "What's the big deal? Why don't you just say 'No'?" And they'd tell you something really stupid to deal with it. Just say no! What are they going to do about it? Not put it on the air? How's that going to hurt you, Bill? Joe? You guys are multi-millionaires. Joe Barbera's always complaining that he can't get humor into cartoons anymore. Just *do it!* You've got your money. If you think you can do a funny cartoon, do a Goddamn funny cartoon. Why do they let the networks



run their lives?

*Maybe because there's more money in doing what the networks want them to do?*

Well, there's the next sale. You don't want to get them mad because they won't buy your show next year, they'll go to DIC. They'll do that anyway! The thing is to get a hit on the air. You get a hit on the air, they're going to come back to you no matter what you do. That's all they really care about.

They're idiots when it comes to figuring out *how* to get a hit on the air. If you sell them the show and just do what you believe in, you'll get a hit. As long as you do every stupid little thing they tell you, there's no control over who's going to have a hit and who isn't. You just wonder which one's going to become a hit. It's certainly not because somebody did better quality than somebody else. Why did *The Smurfs* become a hit? A bunch of blue guys is all I can see there. It wouldn't matter who did it, or what decisions were made on the show. There's nothing in the show that could possibly make it a hit. There's no control over it.

*When you were putting together the show, was your intended audience yourselves, or people your age, or kids, or who?*

My intended audience was everybody. I just want to make cartoons for human beings. I don't think cartoons are only for kids, but at the same time, I think kids will love anything as long as it's visually interesting. My theory is that kids cannot follow stories. They don't know what the hell is going on in a cartoon. What they like to see is funny visual things happening. Why do kids watch Bugs Bunny? They don't get all the jokes. Why do they watch *Rocky and Bullwinkle*? They certainly don't get all the jokes in that. But if the characters are funny looking and do funny things, the kids like them.

At the same time, that's no reason to slough off on the writing. Make it so that other people will like it too. I want to see "cartoons" not be a bad word. I don't want people to instantly turn off when they hear it: "Oh, a *cartoon*." I'd like it to be a word that excites people, adults as well as kids. "A cartoon! Oh, great!" I'm sure at one time it did. In the theatrical days, the forties, when the Warner Bros. bullseye came on, I'll bet the whole audience stood up and cheered, because it was just like watching your favorite short, the Three Stooges or whoever.

(Continued on page 39)

AN ANIMATO ROUNDTABLE:

# "HERE HE COMES TO SAVE THE DAY!"

(...OR WILL HE?)



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*An Animato RoundTable - this is the first of what we hope will be many - is a symposium of professionals, fans, and scholars on a topic of interest to the animation community. To kick off the feature, we asked a bunch of such people for their opinion of Mighty Mouse: the New Adventures. Here's what they told us.*

## **Leonard Maltin:**

I think the new *Mighty Mouse* is a breath of fresh air...a conscious attempt to do something *different* on Saturday morning, and carried out with a spirit of fun and daring. It may not always hit the bullseye, but it's got a lot of energy to carry it over the rough spots.

*(Leonard Maltin is the film correspondent for Entertainment Tonight, and the author of Of Mice and Magic, the Disney Films, and many other books.)*

## **Terry Lindvall:**

The old and new *Mighty Mouse* differ like summer and winter, at least in the vein of Northrop Frye categories. Where summer represents the genre of romance, adventure, and simple fun, Winter ushers

in the moods of irony and satire. A sly tongue-in-cheek quality underlies the new *Mouse*, laced with sophistication and a tad of cynicism. *Mighty's* resuscitated double is a more playful self-parody.

The super rodent was never a favorite of mine. I even preferred the early hordes of Paul Terry pests that overwhelmed Farmer Alfalfa. ("If one mouse is funny, two mice will be twice as funny," and think of a thousand mice.) When *Mighty Mouse* appeared in *Mouse of Tomorrow*, he popped forth as a General Electric wonder product. In a super-market he eats Super Cheese to become a Supermouse, bypassing Nautilus training to surpass the two members of his family tree: Mickey Mouse and Super-



man. His one-dimensional character arrived *deus ex machina*, just in the nick of time to save some poor mice from volcanic eruptions, floods, or attacks of alley cats. But he was generally a very boring mouse.

What Bakshi has done to Mighty Mouse is to rescue him from monotonous repetition. He has invented a new mousetrap for Saturday mornings. The new Mighty Mouse has more self-doubts and he is even less likely to be the hero. In "The League of Super Rodents," Mighty Mouse spends his time being seduced by the sultry, purring Madame Marsupial, remarkably well-endowed and sexy, while his super rodent allies battle the Arch Fiend, the Cow. Mighty Mouse does not actually succumb to the charms of the "Madame" as much as he hungers for her spaghetti. In a scene stolen from *Lady and the Tramp*, Mighty Mouse and Madame Marsupial slurp the opposite ends of a noodle until their lips meet. The result is not modesty, but Tex Avery electricity.

Bakshi's work is packed with inside jokes and footnotes to other cartoons and to all of culture. When an evil villain, the Glove, chases Miss Pureheart and Mighty Mouse to Hollywood, he pauses long enough to sing Randy Newman's "I Glove L.A." Like Clampett's brilliant Beany and Cecil, Bakshi and his zany crew load the episodes with puns and throwaway lines. The criminal genius the Cow tells Madame Marsupial that "when the Cow moos, udders tremble!" To which she replies: "No need to toot your own horn, cow." What Bakshi and his brazen crew do so well is play with the cartoon like no one else has since the Termite Terrace gang. It is fun to see someone enjoying their work, and delightfully contagious as well.

He may not save Saturday morning but Bakshi (et al) has set the alarm ringing with laughter and irony.

*(Terry Lindvall is a professor of film at CBN University.)*

## Chuck Jones:

I don't know whether Ralph or anyone can save Saturday morning TV. We've

been trying for many years to do so with *The Bugs Bunny Show*, but certainly the Bakshi version of *Mighty Mouse* will help clear the air of the smog of spoiled sugar and superslop. It has bite instead of lick, and we should all be grateful for that.

*(If you don't know who Chuck Jones is, you're reading the wrong magazine.)*

## Mike Ventrella:

I feel Bakshi's *Mighty Mouse* may be just the thing to lift Saturday morning out of the doldrums. With every cartoon on today either selling us toys or pushing some pro-social, parent-approved message, it's so nice to have a breath of fresh air!

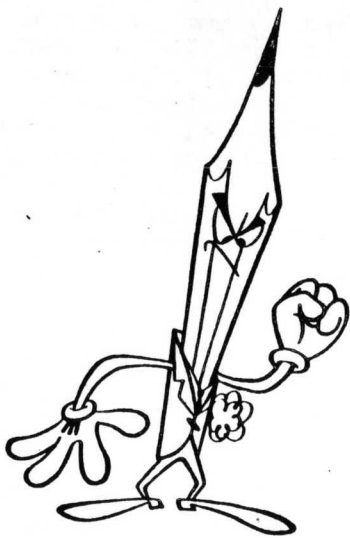
The series introduces some things that haven't been seen in television animation for a long time. Imagination. Caricature. Even satire (and when I say "satire," I don't mean things such as certain episodes of *Muppet Babies*; I mean real cut-'em-close biting wit).

Take, for instance, the wonderful episode "Night on Bald Pate." Here is our classic "bad guy" (he even buys his

---

*Madame Marsupial.*





Four characters from the "See You in the Funny Papers" episode: Pencil Neck, Head Cheese, Yuge the Conqueror, and the Elvis Balloon.

stupid henchmen at the Stupid Henchmen Outlet) trying to outwit our beloved hero. He throws every trick the bad guys are supposed to throw, beginning with the capture of Pearl Pureheart with the message that if Mighty Mouse does not surrender, nobody will ever see Pearl again (except on weekends and legal holidays). He uses a can of cheese whip to hold back our hero (who comments that "this stuff is thicker than country music!"). When all else fails, he throws himself into his secret, never-before-tested module, which crackles and throws lights menacingly, but only has the effect of giving the villain a nice tan so that he'll "look good when they take my picture in jail!"

For years, the best thing on Saturday morning was the watered-down Warner Bros. cartoon collection in its various guises. Now we have something that reaches for even more, bringing back memories of the crazy WBs that TV won't show. What's more, this show can be enjoyed by people who have no particular interest in animation. I've shown it to friends who laugh uproariously, incredulously asking, "Is *this* on Saturday morning?"

Yes, the show has its problems. Some episodes, like "Mouse From Another House" (which compares Mighty Mouse's

origin to Superman's) and "Scrap Happy" (a sort of *Pinocchio* satire) never reach their potential. Other episodes ("Scrappy's Playhouse," "Stress for Success") are merely vehicles to intertwine old Terrytoons footage with new material in a money-saving measure. Some are nothing but old cartoons ("Animation Concerto," "Mighty's Music Classics").

All in all, however, most of the cartoons are worth watching again and again - and how many cartoons (even theatrically-made ones) can live up to that standard?

(Mike Ventrella is the co-editor of *Animato*.)

## Mark Mayerson:

I've seen a lot of student films, and I've noticed that they have certain things in common. A lot of the filmmaker's enthusiasm and raw energy come across. It's like the filmmaker is screaming to the audience, "Hey, I had fun. Now you have fun, too." The audience usually catches the spirit and goes along for the ride, even if the film is technically inadequate. Student films suffer from inexperience, and the filmmaker doesn't have enough control over the medium to really pull things off. Enthusiasm has to make up for problems with story structure, gag structure, design, pacing,



staging, and characterization. Student filmmakers are often self-indulgent and put in things for themselves while forgetting about the audience.

Bakshi's *Mighty Mouse* series has a lot in common with student films, even though it's made by experienced people. You might think that years of experience would count for something, but the TV business is not kind to creative people. Networks, parent groups, toy manufacturers, and producers all take turns beating the cartoon industry over the head. The creative people have to put up with all this while they continue to crank out huge amounts of footage. While you can spend years in the cartoon business, the working conditions don't offer many opportunities to master your craft.

Bakshi is to be commended for uncaging his artists, but he's proven to be an inadequate mentor. He is not really very good at telling a story, whether it's comic or dramatic, so he and his crew share the same blind spots and he can't compensate for their shortcomings. They have clearly enjoyed themselves with references to their personal cartoon, comic book, and movie favorites, but their enthusiasm is constantly undercut by the bad presentation of their ideas. The films rarely maintain

their energy and inventiveness for their duration, and meander towards their conclusions instead of speeding towards them.

The tragedy is not that *Mighty Mouse* isn't what it should be. The tragedy is that the show, as it stands, is the best cartoon on Saturday mornings, and is the best we can expect under current industry conditions. The public and the artists deserve better.

*(Mark Mayerson is an animator on Captain Power and the Soldiers of the Future, a show he readily admits is mediocre.)*

## Jon King:

Bakshi is attempting to break through the confines of limited SatAM animation through the use of exaggerated posing, hectic pacing, and takeoff humor. It's a refreshing break from the usual contrived drivel associated with TV animation and recalls cartoon traditions lost. Although Bakshi's efforts sometimes come across as jarring and incomprehensible, it's nevertheless encouraging to see someone at least trying to bring the medium back to a more expressive state. I'll continue to watch, if for no other reason than to see if Heckle and Jeckle get thawed out, too.

*(Jon King is a Vermont-based animation inventor who is developing a computer*



animation system.)

## Clive Smith:

No, *Mighty Mouse: the New Adventures* is not going to save Saturday morning TV; yes, it is self-indulgent; no, it is not drivel. Actually, Ralph Bakshi's new *Mighty Mouse* is about the most refreshing new series to appear in this time slot in years. It's refreshing in its "look:" intentionally flat, extreme in design, and an outrageous parody of 1950s cartoon styles rolled up with a fairly hip graphic sensibility of the 1980s.

And it's quite funny. It's also refreshing in its solution to the restrictions inherent in Saturday-morning production budgets, and it makes no excuses for its limited animation. Unlike (many) other shows, *Mighty Mouse* would not benefit from more drawings. Taking its cue, again, from early cartoon timing, the animation has been intelligently stylized to meet the production limitations and enhance the design. The animation is as funny as the look.

But as radical as the visuals are, they become quite pedestrian compared to some of the writing, which at times is virtually obscure. The participation of the animators in the scripting of shows is good for an animation studio. How these ideas are incorporated into the shows, however, depends a lot on the nature of the shows and the audience to which they're aimed.

*Mighty Mouse*, at times, has the accessibility of a Tom and Jerry cartoon. But at other times, it's a highly sophisticated string of wacky in-jokes from animators and film

### Striking Poses:

This sequence of layout drawings of *Mighty Mouse* and old colleague Gandy Goose, from the "The Icegoose Cometh" episode, shows *Mighty Mouse: the New Adventures*'s emphasis on sharply defined, expression-filled poses.



historians, totally incomprehensible to the majority of the audience. When the jokes become as obscure as making references to events that occurred during the production itself, you're really talking self-indulgence, and I have to question the intentions of the show.

After the new coat has become comfortable and worn, we are still left with the basic task of story-telling and allowing the audience access to the story on as many levels as possible. If you can weave in the animation jokes and industry pokes without losing this basic integrity, that's fine. But as far as obscure references are concerned, as they say in the art business, "You've got to draw the line somewhere."

I personally like the show, and for all its faults consider it a quality program and a step in the right direction for kids' cartoons. But then, I'm from an animation background. The low numbers it pulls in its time slot reflect the fact that the rest of the audience isn't.

(Clive Smith, the director of *Rock & Rule*, is a producer/director at Canada's *Nelvana Ltd.*, of which he was a co-founder.)

## Sally Cruikshank:

I think *Mighty Mouse: the New Adventures* is the best-designed animation Ralph Bakshi's ever been involved with. I like the energy of the design, and the way it seems to accept the limitations of the animation light-heartedly and with humor. It has a jolly feeling, and looks as if the animators were enjoying their work. The two times I've sat down to watch the show I've thought at first "Great, this is great," then got bored and left the room. I even wondered if the show was a repeat of the one I'd seen three weeks before but am fairly sure that's not possible.

(Sally Cruikshank is the creator of *Quasi* at the Quackadero, *Make Me Psychic*, and other films. Her latest short is *Face Like a Frog*.)

## Bob White:

For this *Animato* assignment, I watched "The League of Super Rodents" and "Scrappy's Playhouse" or something.

First thing I notice is that they are using color lines on the characters instead of black. Can't remember color line in animation since Saint Disney's *Peter Pan*. The Xerox machine making the pencil-to-ink transfer just did black line. Color line, that's cool.

Next, I see big close ups, bright colors, stretched stuff like perspective and angles, and I am reminded of the *UPA* cartoons.

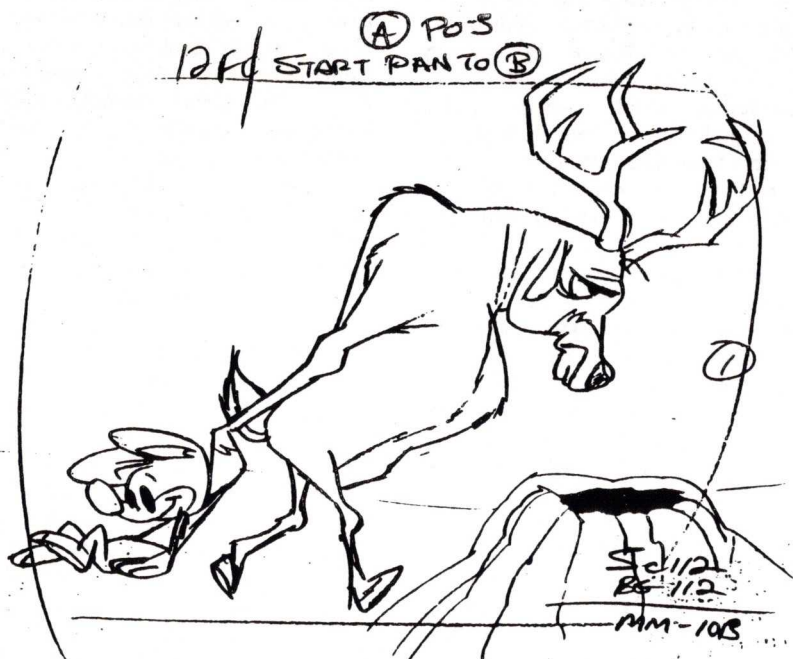
Narrator comes in. OK. Sets the scene. Then there's this sexy babe, Madame Marsupial, with really high, pointed breasts. All in favor of breasts, I (remember what *Animato* #5 said about my *Moonage Daydream*), but now I'm thinking back to *Wizards* and *Elinor*. There was an obviousness about her sex, not a subtleness about her sexuality. I wanted to be able to fantasize about an elfin princesses, not be embarrassed by an aging stripper.

Madame Marsupial turns out to be a bitch. She hits on some villain to attract *Mighty Mouse*, and then dumps *Mighty* for some musclebound guy. Ughh. Nice, Ralph. Like women much?

So *Mighty Mouse* sounds like *Dudley Do-Right*, you know. He gets all mushy when Madame M hits on him, and becomes a flashing X-ray when he gets kissed. (That's cool.) But I haven't laughed yet.

You know what the *Magoo* test is? Film business types and producers test given audience reactions by showing them a *Mister Magoo* cartoon and monitoring their laughs. That way they can gauge how they react to test TV shows and the like against a sample they have control over. I guess if you can get off on *Mister Magoo*, you are normal. I laughed hysterically at *Pee-Wee's Playhouse* a year ago when he was new. I don't watch him now because I don't think it was cool to move to LA and screw with what he had that was good. The new *King of Cartoons* is a fake, as well as all the other new actors, and *Globoy* doesn't even look the same, *fer chrissake!* Now you have a *Magoo* on me. *Mighty Mouse* isn't as funny as I thought *Pee Wee* was a year ago.

I like sight gags, and gags in general.



From a scene that was cut from "Mighty's Benefit Plan."

Mexican standoff of muscle-pumping body builders, Mighty eating one of his team along with his spaghetti, The Cow handicapping himself by taping his tongue to the ceiling, and there is a G.I. Gerbil.

At 10:43 it was over. The other episode was made up of a lot of antique cartoon footage, including the original MM, edited together with a running commentary from some kid rats (ever see Mel Brooks' *The Critic*?) watching their homemade film festival. Historically interesting but rather cheap filler.

Bob White is a professor of film at Simmons College and an independent animator.

## Nancy Beiman:

Saturday AM should not take itself too seriously. They haven't got the budgets to do really full animation, so it's more intelligent to concentrate on story and character design. This is exactly where most Saturday morning stuff is particularly deplorable (although it is hard to quantify the deplorability of sections

of something that is inferior in every way to quality animation).

*Mighty Mouse: the New Adventures* doesn't sell toys, it is certainly not aimed at kids (though, as Mike Maltese once said, "The kids are gonna like it anyway.") It is hilariously written and always offbeat even when individual episodes are not entirely successful.

Ralph Bakshi deserves praise for putting together a crew that can turn out a really funny show. I've heard CBS hates it, probably because it's not sweet and fuzzy and product oriented (one only has to recall the "moral fable" at the end of "Puffy Goes Berserk," in which the world is extolled as a "more commercially viable place in which to live" to see various executives growing red-faced and pop-eyed). I hope that Bakshi can keep going and that *Mighty Mouse* signifies the end of the half-hour commercial and a return of entertainment value to animation.

(Nancy Beiman is a director and animator at Caged Beagle Productions, and creator of the cartoon *Your Feet's Too Big*.)





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A VISIT TO THE MUSEUM OF CARTOON  
ART'S FLEISCHER STUDIOS EXHIBIT

# BETTY BOOP'S MUSEUM

BY HARRY MCCrackEN

**B**etty Boop, Popeye, and the rest of the Fleischer Studios gang paid an extended visit to Ward Castle in Rye Brook, New York recently. The occasion was the Museum of Cartoon Art's Fleischer show, which from November to March gave Max and Dave Fleischer's work and the artists that created it an impressive and long-overdue tribute that ranked with the 1981 Whitney Museum Disney and 1985 Museum of Modern Art Warner shows.

The show, which filled all three exhibit rooms of the Museum's second floor and spilled out into the hall and stairway, featured over one hundred pieces of Fleischer artwork. Drawings from virtually every stage of animated filmmak-

ing were represented, from rough story sketches to model sheets to animation drawings to lavish background-and-cel setups. (Much of the art was credited to its artist, a welcome touch.) Also on display were many rare historical items, including photographs, posters, and vintage memorabilia.

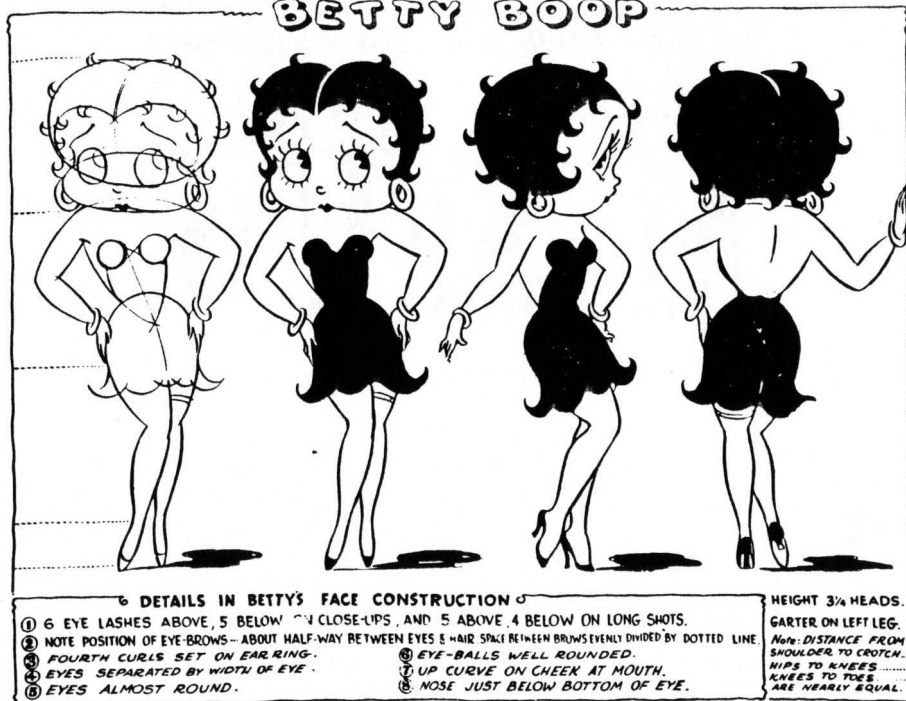
This eye-popping collection of Fleischer materials was even more impressive considering the enormous difficulties behind its assemblage. Like most Hollywood animation studios - Disney is the notable exception - Fleischer never considered its original artwork to be something that should be methodically preserved for historical or other reasons. As a result, relatively little Fleischer production art has survived, and most of what has is scattered across

*The Museum of Cartoon Art,  
as rendered by John  
Cullen Murphy.*





# BETTY BOOP



A Betty Boop model sheet, one of several model sheets included in the show.  
Character (c) 1988 King Features Syndicate.

the country in private collections. The Museum's exhibit was culled from the possessions of several collectors and the Fleischer Studio Archives (an institution I hadn't heard of before attending the show). The bulk of the artwork was from the collection of noted California collectors Mike and Jeanne Glad, whose admirable and very successful attempts to gather as much Fleischer artwork in one place as possible made a show of this scale feasible.

That so little Fleischer art was saved undoubtedly explains the show's virtual lack of material dealing with Fleischer's silent days and its limited amount of Betty Boop and early Popeye artwork. Many of the pieces in the show were from the later cartoons - films including the Color Classics, *Gulliver's Travels*, and *Mr. Bug Goes to Town* - that most fans find less interesting than the studio's black-and-white shorts. (The studio's successor, Famous Studios, was also represented by a surprisingly large

amount of artwork, including some very, very early sketches of Casper the Friendly Ghost.)

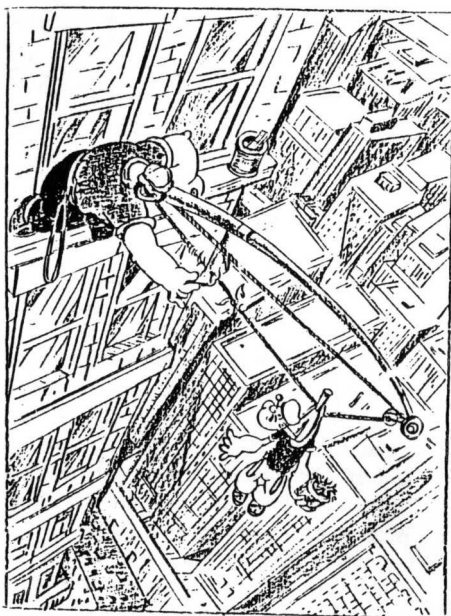
Fleischer fans have often commented ruefully on the studio's gradual discarding of its gritty New York house style in favor of a halfhearted, not-very-successful Disney imitation in the later thirties. The show's multitude of artwork from the later films made clear that their disappointing wholes were less than the sums of some excellent parts. A lot of fine work - much of which the show gave most of us our first opportunity to see - went into even the least well-regarded of the Fleischer cartoons.

In many cases, it's clear that it was the Fleischer style of animation itself - the alternately mechanical and rubbery, joyously cartoonish style that worked wonderfully well for Popeye and Betty Boop - that made the later Fleischer





Left: the cover of an issue of the Fleischer house organ. Below: pencil drawings for two Popeye poster designs: The Painless Window Washer (top) and My Pop, My Pop (bottom). Characters (c) King Features Syndicate.



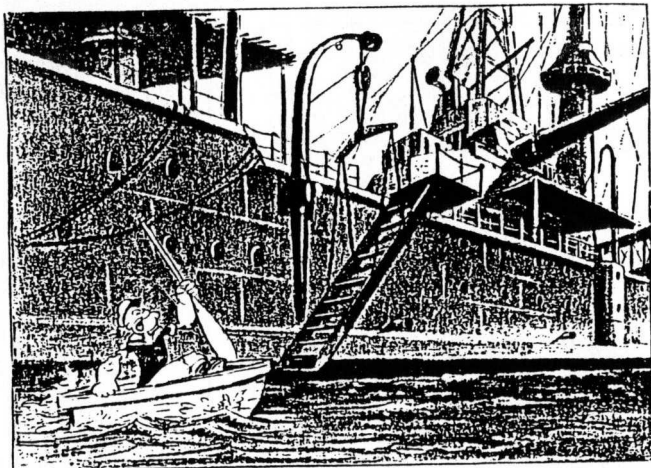
films so often disappointing. The many pencil drawings in the show from *Mr. Bug Goes to Town* capture a delicate, almost pastoral feel that the Fleischer artists captured only occasionally in the finished film. Fleischer's Superman cartoons struck their intended flavor far more successfully than *Mr. Bug*, but the tightly-rendered black-and-white storyboard drawings for Superman cartoons are even more spectacularly moody than the cartoons themselves.

The show's finished artwork - cels and painted backgrounds - were at their best no less fascinating than the preliminary drawings. The Fleischer Studio's cartoons aren't usually associated with beautiful colors; the Disney's studio's monopoly on Technicolor led them to use the inferior Cinecolor process, and most circulating prints of Fleischer cartoons range from mediocre on down in quality. (The Superman cartoons in particular are most often seen in muddy, coarsened form.)

No such impediments kept museum visitors from appreciating the Fleischer artists' marvelous use of color in the exhibited cels and backgrounds. The enormous, panoramic backgrounds created by the Fleischer artists for *Gulliver*



A layout drawing by  
Anton Loeb from a  
Popeye cartoon.  
Character (c) King  
Features Syndicate.



and *Mr. Bug* rival the best Disney backgrounds of the same period in their ornate, beautifully rendered construction of a fantasy landscape for the character to perform on; Also on display were two wonderful watercolors from *Popeye Meets Sinbad the Sailor*, and some remarkably handsome Famous Studio-era paintings. What a pity that the characters, like Honey Bee, King Little, and Gabby, who made use of this gorgeous scenery were so lackluster compared to both their Fleischer predecessors and Disney competitors.

The production art was clearly the show's center of attention, but the show also contained many ancillary items of interest, ranging from a number of well-preserved Fleischer theatrical posters (few were ever produced), to greeting cards sent out by Fleischer employees. A glass case held Fleischer merchandise from 1930s Betty Boop and Gulliver toys to contemporary Popeye dolls and Leslie Carbaga-designed Boop ceramics. Other items of particular interest were a photograph of a 1956 "Inkwell Reunion" dinner attended by Max and Richard Fleischer, Walt Disney, Dick Heumer, Ben Sharpsteen and others; a yearbook-style grid of photographs of the studio's employees in 1930-1931; and a copy of *Fleischer's Animated News*, a house organ put together by the

Fleischer staff.

Lest museum visitors forget why all of the art in the show was created, the show also incorporated the Fleischer cartoons themselves, in a continuous video program of shorts and weekend showings of the two features. No trip to the show could really be complete without at least a few minutes devoted to simply sitting back and being entertained by these delightful films: the Fleischer cartoons, after all, are such unpretentious, affable things that taking them *too* seriously would probably be a mistake. It's nice to be reminded, though, of the tremendous amount of labor, care, and skill that went into making them, and the Museum of Cartoon Art's Fleischer show did that very well indeed.

Those who couldn't make it to the Museum's show can get a taste of it from the new, substantially revised edition of Leslie Carbaga's *The Fleischer Story* (Da Capo Press; \$16.95). The new edition contains numerous illustrations that weren't in the original 1976 volume, many of which were also on display in the Fleischer exhibit. Carbaga's text, while full of valuable information, is rather eccentric in prose style and organization, and the filmography is poorly edited. Still, as the only book-length overview of the Fleischer Studio available, the book is well worth the money.

## Thirty Years of Hanna-Barbera

# MY YOUTH IN CARTOONIA

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### PART TWO

ARTICLE AND ILLUSTRATIONS  
BY BOB MILLER

**I**n the fall of 1964 came *The Adventures of Jonny Quest*, and if ever there was a show that traumatized impressionable young minds, *Quest* was it. I couldn't forget the time an invisible monster attacked a jungle village and devoured a native boy. Later in the same village, the monster advanced on Jonny, who couldn't activate his rocket belt. Oh, the horror of it all! I was too young to realize that if it was the end of Jonny, it was the end of the series.

I wasn't sure what to make of the show at first. It seemed to be real, and yet it wasn't. The people didn't look silly like the Flintstones. They talked like regular people, too. The surroundings looked like they actually existed. And any kid who thought being kissed by a girl was icky *had* to be real.

I loved the neat equipment the Quests used - the hydrofoil, the air cushion vehicles, the jet that could take off and land vertically. I wanted to *be* Jonny Quest, so I could jet-ski like he did, fly rocket packs like he did, and slide down log flumes like he did. So when my cousin came for a visit, we played Jonny Quest. I was Jonny; she (yes, she) was Jonny's friend Hadji. "Hadji" would say "Sim sim, salla bim," but for some strange reason, I didn't float off the ground. We could never figure out how

the real Hadji did it.

Alas, my favorite show only lasted one season. I'd have to wait 22 years for new episodes that would appear during *The Fantastic World of Hanna-Barbera* Sunday mornings.

Secret Squirrel and Atom Ant began my Saturday morning viewing in 1965. Secret was a lot of fun, with his hat that had all kinds of spy gadgets for every occasion. I didn't care much for Squiddley Diddley, the star-struck squid who was yet another rehash of the Captive Animal syndrome. But I did like Winsome Witch, who was H-B's first female human star to solo in her own series.

Atom Ant became another one of my favorites. He could withstand the worst punishments the bad guys could give, and win every time. (The fact that he was practically indestructible didn't hurt.) Precious Pupp (the precursor to Dick Dastardly's canine sidekick, Muttley) was too homely and obnoxious for me. But I did enjoy *The Hillbilly Bears*. The stories centered around Paw Rugg, a lanky, lazy bruin whose mumblings could only be understood by Maw Rugg, the real backbone of the family, and their kids Floral and Shagg Rugg. Paw and Maw both smoked corncob pipes, probably the last cartoon characters allowed to

smoke on Saturday mornings.

The superhero craze began in earnest in 1966. For the next two years, Hanna-Barbera produced so many superhero cartoons they actually competed with themselves.

The man most responsible for sparking this trend was Fred Silverman, who was then director of daytime programs and development at CBS. When he brought the superhero shows to Saturday morning, he must have been reading my mind, because as I was growing into adolescence, I was growing tired of silly animals getting konked on the head. That was "kid stuff" to me. I wanted to watch something that was, well, more believable. That something turned out to be *Space Ghost*.

Okay, so *Space Ghost* wasn't totally believable. Even as a kid I knew space was an airless vacuum. So how could he breathe without oxygen? Or talk? And how did every monster he met learn to speak fluent English? My answer was "It's just a cartoon," so I had to settle for that. But I loved the show. At least the humans looked like human beings, and not like Fred Flintstone. It was fun to watch *Space Ghost* turn invisible, and whip the bad guys with his fancy power

rays. The stories were exciting, and they stimulated my sense of wonder about outer space.

The only other superhero show produced by Hanna-Barbera that I really enjoyed was *The Fantastic Four*. Compared to the other dime-a-dozen heroes, the Four had some depth to their characters. Who could not feel sorry for the Thing? The show also prompted me to read the comic book, and thus was born a Marvel Comics collector.

I also have to mention *Frankenstein Jr.*, if only because he is perhaps the earliest American TV robot with transforming capabilities. His booming voice was provided by the late Ted Cassidy, whom *Addams Family* fans will remember as Lurch the butler. Cassidy also voiced Galacticus in Hanna-Barbera's *The Fantastic Four* (and the Thing in Depatie-Freleng's 1978 version). *Star Trek* fans will remember him as the android Ruk in "What are Little Girls Made of," and his voice from "The Corbomite Maneuver."

The superhero fad ended with viewer backlash against violence on television. Hanna-Barbera returned to slapstick with *Wacky Races* and its spinoffs, *The Perils of Penelope Pitstop* and *Dastardly and*

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*Space Ghost and the Smurfs. Characters (c) Hanna-Barbera.*





*Muttley in their Flying Machines.* But with the advent of Action for Children's Television and other pressure groups, creative restrictions were clamped down on Hanna-Barbera and other studios, and as a result, the quality of the new cartoons suffered. For this reason, and perhaps because I was growing up, cartoons were losing their appeal to me, and I began to stop watching.

I couldn't figure out what made *Scooby Doo, Where are You?* so popular. It seemed to me the show was more stupid than funny, and yet, for some reason, it still managed to last over 15 years on Saturday morning. *Scooby Doo* did inspire what has come to be known as the "Let's Get Out of Here" syndrome. The premise is that you have a gang of teenagers and a (name the animal) out solving mysteries. They encounter the villain, they say "Let's get out of here!" and run like crazy while bubblegum rock music plays in the background. You'll find this formula repeated in many of H-B's later shows: *Josie and the Pussycats*, *The Funky Phantom*, *The Amazing Chan and the Chan Clan*, *Speed Buggy*, *Butch*

*Cassidy*, *Goober and the Ghost Chasers*, *Clue Club*, *Jabberjaw*, *The New Shmoo*, *Captain Caveman*, *Casper and the Space Angels*, *The Buford Files*, *The Galloping Ghost*, and -

I guess I've made my point, haven't I?

Perhaps the character with the most bizarre origin had to be Jonathan Muddlemore, who in 1776 locked himself and his cat in a grandfather clock to avoid capture by redcoats. What happened next? Starvation, dehydration, possibly suffocation, and then deterioration - a nice, pleasant way to die. (A miracle this was allowed by network censors!) Nearly two centuries later - and by sheer coincidence - some curious teenagers twirl the hands of the clock, releasing the ghostly forms of Muddlemore and the cat. The kids dub him *The Funky Phantom*, and, since he has nothing better to do, he helps the gang solve mysteries. Micky Dolenz of the Monkees vocalized Augie (no relation to the Doggie), and the ubiquitous Daws Butler voiced "Muddsy," who for some reason sounded like Snagglepuss, except he said "Heavens to

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*Fred and Barney meet the Thing? They really did in a 1970s Hanna-Barbera series. Characters (c) Hanna-Barbera and Marvel Entertainment Group.*





Bunker Hill" instead of "Heavens to Murgatroyd." And he had whiskers, even. Interestingly enough, he was most popular in the comic books, which lasted nearly three years after the show's cancellation.

During the 1970s, H-B began to make more cartoons based on live-action shows, and fewer with their own original characters. *Jeannie* was a teenaged version of *I Dream of Jeannie*, noteworthy because Mark Hamill voiced her boyfriend, Corey. Other examples include animated versions of *The Addams Family*, *The Partridge Family* (2000 A.D.), *Fonz and the Happy Days Gang*, and *Godzilla*.

Blockbuster movies were also fair game for Saturday morning imitations. Obviously "inspired" by a certain fish movie directed by Steven Spielberg, *Jabberjaw* was a combination of genres: science fiction, slapstick, "Let's Get Out of Here," and bubblegum rock videos. Another hard-luck character, the whiny *Jabberjaw* had the voice and mannerisms of a Stooge named Curly. His constant complaint was "No repsect!" (A phrase which Rodney Dangerfield had popularized.) Unlike his cartoon cohorts, he didn't wear any clothes. (Hey, how did that get past the censors?)

Perhaps the worst cartoon of the 70s

(or any time) was the *Great Grape Ape*, whose 40-foot size was exceeded only by his stupidity. His vocabulary was limited to muttering "Grape Ape" over and over, calling his canine chum "Beegley Beagley" and saying "Sor-ryyyy" for his constant bungling. Just as people would react to Casper by screaming "A gho-o-o-ost!" people would react to Grape by crying "A goril-lil-lil-illa!" How original.

Hanna-Barbera's next big success came in 1981 with a tribe of little blue clones three apples tall - the Smurfs. The show is still going strong, with over 125 episodes already in syndication, and more being made for Saturday morning.

In recent years, the studio has decided to revive *The Jetsons*, *Snorks*, and *Jonny Quest* for the syndication market, which means it doesn't have to worry about network censorship. Ditto for the home video market, which has enabled them to release classical tales from the Bible to phenomenal success. Without restrictions from the networks, creativity may flourish once again, and maybe, just maybe, Hanna-Barbera can bring back the old magic and make cartoons fun again.

So here's to you, Bill and Joe. Thanks for making part of my childhood a happy one.



# KOKO KOMMENTS

*A Fleischer Studios Column by G. Michael Dobbs*

## THE FLEISCHER SUPERMAN CARTOONS PART TWO

As a body of seventeen cartoons, the Fleischer/Famous *Superman* shorts are perhaps the most impressive single cartoon series from the "Golden Age" of theatrical animation. Their use of full animation in telling an adventure story, combined with their "live-action" use of camera angles, lush musical and effects tracks, and wonderful use of color sets them apart. Among the seventeen, there were some that were better than others, and in the next two installments of this column, each of the shorts will be examined.

It's important to realize several important influences before watching a Fleischer *Superman*. This is the Superman of the pre-Kryptonite days. This is the man from another planet who gets around by *leaping*. While he has incredible strength, he can be affected by electrical shock, tons of scrap metal, and tear gas. He's a lot more human than the hero we know from later comic books and television. The weaknesses that Shuster and Siegel put into their most famous creation served the story department at Fleischer's well, and the studio was never at a loss when dreaming up new perils for the Man of Steel.

Radio had a big influence on the shorts as well. The Fleischer Studio wisely copied the opening of the extremely

popular Mutual Superman radio series. The opening narration gives the shorts the same flavor of dramatic radio, and the casting of Bud Collyer, the Superman of radio, as the voice of the cartoon hero is perfect.

The driving, heroic theme for the series was written by the studio's leading composer, Sammy Timburg. Timburg was a vaudeville veteran who provided many of the songs and scores for the Fleischer Studio output throughout the thirties. The scores for the Superman shorts were undoubtedly his most complex, although he told me the assignment he like the most was composing for Betty Boop.

The Fleischer Superman cartoons:

*Superman* (c) September 26, 1941.  
Directed by Dave Fleischer; story by Seymour Kneitel and Isidore Sparber; animated by Steve Muffati and Frank Endres.

In this kickoff to the series, Superman is introduced to us with a quick biography, and the action begins as he battles the destructive ray of a mad scientist. Although there is comic relief in the film in the form of the villain's pet crow, the lack of such characters in succeeding entries leads one to believe

that the studio decided it better to play the stories straight.

The animation as Superman beats the ray back to its source is breathtaking, and the use of shadows and colors is simply overwhelming. As with all Fleischer cartoons, the two animators credited are the head animators, who really directed the short.

*Superman in The Mechanical Monsters* (c) November 28, 1941. Directed by Dave Fleischer; story by Isidore Sparber and Seymour Kneitel; animated by Steve Muffati and George Germanetti.

A knockout of a cartoon with Superman battling a dozen killer robots. There is one mistake in continuity, as the number on the principal robot changes. Once again, Lois puts herself in danger for the story, and Superman saves the day.

*Superman in Billion Dollar Limited* (c) January 9, 1942. Directed by Dave Fleischer; story by Seymour Kneitel and

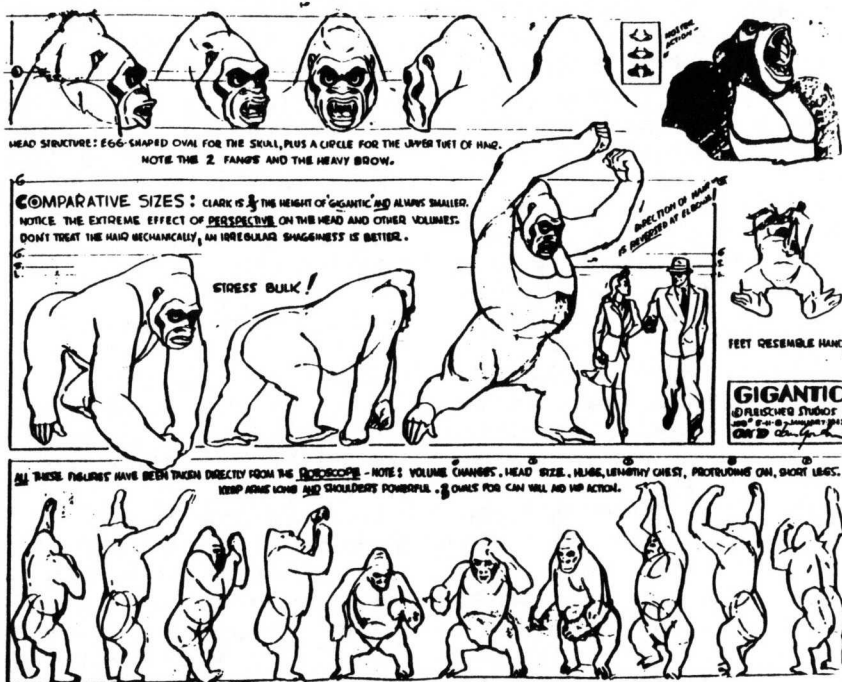
Isidore Sparber; animated by Myron Waldman and Frank Endres.

One of my personal favorites, due to the wonderful animation of Superman as he tries to pull the gold train while being teargassed by the villains. The animation team headed by Waldman and Endres outdid themselves in showing the stress the character was experiencing. Lois has a great moment when she fearlessly exchanges machine gun fire with the train bandits!

*Superman in the Arctic Giant* (c) February 27, 1942. Directed by Dave Fleischer; story by Bill Turner and Ted Pierce; animated by Willard Bowsky and Reuben Grossman.

For me, this cartoon is a bit of a disappointment, as the arctic giant, really a dinosaur, is designed in an almost buffoonish manner. The creature is not menacing enough, although this doesn't stop him from wrecking a fair chunk of Metropolis before Superman

*A previously-unpublished model sheet for the gorilla from Superman in Terror on the Midway. Note the comparison of size between the ape and Clark Kent and Lois Lane, and that the film's working title was Gigantic.*





can put him in the Metropolis zoo.

*Superman in The Bulleteers* (c) March 27, 1942. Directed by Dave Fleischer; story by Bill Turner and Carl Meyer; animated by Orestes Calpini and Graham Place.

Another marvelous night-time adventure, as Superman tries to stop a gang of thieves who raid Metropolis in a bullet-shaped car. A typical example of the live-action movie look the studio adopted for the series can be found in the traveling shot through the crowds outside City Hall and into the mayor's office. While there is a certain economy of movement in the sequence, the look gives it a great atmosphere. Unlike the later live-action television series, there is an epic feeling to many of these Superman cartoons.

*Superman in The Magnetic Telescope* (c) April 24, 1942. Directed by Dave Fleischer; story by Dan Gordon and Carl Meyer; animated by Myron Waldman and Thomas Moore.

The storyline for this short is pure comic book hokum, but it is very enjoyable. Superman must save Metropolis from a comet a scientist has brought to earth with his magnetic telescope. Comic book fans might notice the striking resemblance between the cartoon's scientist and the evil Dr. Sivana of the Captain Marvel comic books. The outstanding moment comes when Superman acts as a human extension cord.

*Superman in Electric Earthquake* (c) May 15, 1942. Directed by Dave Fleischer; story by Seymour Kneitel and Isidore Sparber; animated by Steve Muffati and Arnold Gillespie.

An American Indian attempts to get Manhattan back from the white men by setting off an electrically-induced earthquake. More nifty comic book science fiction, with Superman showing his human side as he gasps for air while pushing the electrical connections out of the ocean floor. Again, Lois puts herself in danger, and one gets the impression that she is getting used to it!

*Superman in The Volcano* (c) July 10, 1942. Directed by Dave Fleischer; story by Bill Turner and Carl Meyer; animated by Willard Bowsky and Otto Feuer.

A truly epic cartoon as Superman saves a tropical island from its volcano. Bud Collyer's voice was not used in this cartoon, although the new actor did not have a vastly different approach to the character. There is an in-joke towards the end of the cartoons...the now-altered volcano looks like the Paramount mountain!

*Superman in Terror on the Midway* (c) August 28, 1942. Directed by Dave Fleischer (his last credit on a Paramount-released short); story by Jay Morton and Dan Gordon; animated by Orestes Calpini and Jim Davis.

What's most impressive about this cartoon are the use of shadows and some of the very odd camera angles. There is one sequence which consists of very tight closeups of Superman and the escaped giant ape he's trying to capture which is absolutely impressionistic! A stunning cartoon.

By the time *Superman in The Volcano* had been released, the Fleischer brothers had been forced out of their studio by the management of Paramount Pictures, the distributors of their cartoons. Paramount promoted Max's son-in-law Seymour Kneitel, storyman Isidore Sparber, and office manager Sam Buchwald into the new managers of the studio, which Paramount renamed the Famous Studio, after its sheet-music publishing division. The Popeye and Superman cartoons continued production, although within several years Paramount would drop the Superman series, move the studio back to New York City from Miami, and cut its budget.

In the next issue of *Animato*, I'll look at the Famous Studios Superman shorts. Until then, if you have a question or comments, please write to me at 24 Hampden Street, Indian Orchard, MA 01151.

*G. Michael Dobbs is the official biographer of Max Fleischer.*

# FLIPBOOKS

*A Book Column by David Bastian*

## TWO DISNEY MASTERS EXAMINE THEIR CRAFT

*Too Funny For Words: Disney's Greatest Sight Gags*

By Frank Thomas and Oliver Johnston  
Abbeville Press; \$39.95

In this new book by veteran Disney animators Thomas and Johnston, film historian John Culhane is quoted as saying, "An animator was like the princess in the fairy tale who had to spin straw into gold." At no time does this simile ring more true than when being used to describe the classic bits of Disney animation the book reproduces to help explore and analyze "the Disney humor." Six years after the publication of their first magnum opus, *Disney Animation: the Illusion of Life*, Frank and Ollie have returned to the vaults to amass over 100 incidents from Disney shorts that best typify the studio's brand of humor.

The book is divided neatly into two parts, with the first half a reminiscence

about life at the Disney studio when its rising cast of characters were still bouncy, flexible, black and white, and in service to the vaudevillian, lowbrow stunts that they were created to perform. As the Disney characters began to grow (and as the animators grew with them), their personalities began to lend themselves to certain kinds of gags, and consequently certain gags which were funny in and of themselves seemed even more funny when performed by a certain character.

For example, it would not elicit laughter to have Mickey Mouse become increasingly frustrated over the same kind of predicament in which Donald Duck so often found himself. A role reversal such as this would only distress us. Instead, we laugh at how Mickey escapes from a situation; we laugh at how Donald creates the situation for himself, and becomes caught up in it. All of a sudden, the gags were in service to the characters, not vice versa. A

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*Gus Goose, from Donald's Cousin Gus (1939). (c) the Walt Disney Company.*

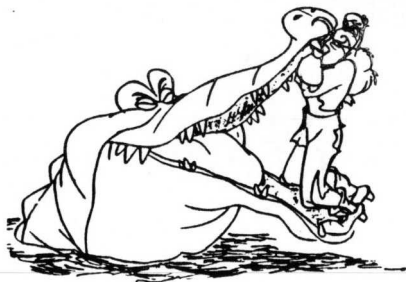


great gag was no longer just a big laugh-getter, but also one which helped to establish the characters, and more importantly, their relationship with one another.

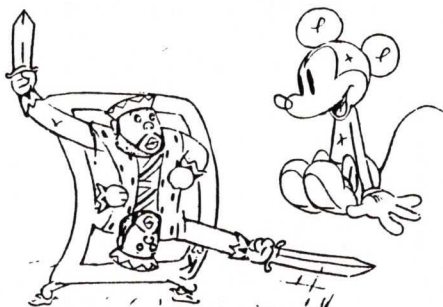
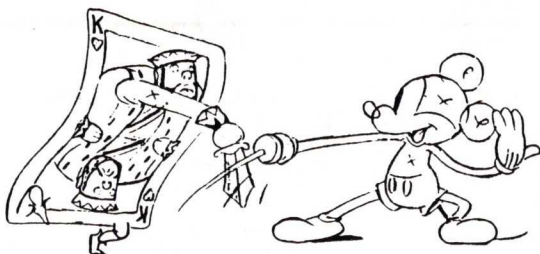
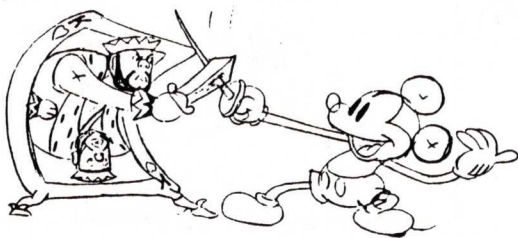
Certainly one of the contributing factors to this advancement (and a factor that many have blamed for the depersonalization of animation as a medium of artistic animation) was Walt's assigning of each animator to the character with which he was best able to become involved. There are those who actually believe that just because an animator was not active in the story department, he was merely a technician in the employ of ideas that were uncontestedly handed down to him.

Those who adhere to this doctrine do so because they want to believe that a corporate setting cannot produce good quality art. In fact, the animators made the final contribution to the story with the insertion of personal touches that made the characters and situations more believable. The sequence from *Bambi* in which Thumper makes several unsuccessful attempts to teach Bambi how to iceskate, and the spaghetti-dinner scene in which *Lady and the Tramp* fall in love, are both recounted as having been vague outlines in the story before assigned to their animators (who were by that time cast by film sequence rather than by character). The authors state that "as animators found ways to portray humor through the inner feelings of the characters, the audiences became more involved with each new personality and more concerned about his welfare."

The second half of the book is made up almost entirely of artwork, examples of the seven different types of sight gags in Disney films, as defined by the authors: the Spot Gag (an isolated single joke); the Running Gag (a gag that occurs several times during a picture, becoming funnier through repetition); the Gag-that-Builds (a series of gags that increase in intensity); the Action Gag (concerned less with what the gag is than how it is performed); the Tableau Gag (a held picture at the end of an action, illustrating the result of that action); the Inanimate Character Gag (humor in giving an object a personality that fits both its appearance and function); and the Funny Drawing (the drawing itself



*Captain Hook and the Crocodile, from Peter Pan (1953). (c) the Walt Disney Company.*



*From Thru the Mirror (1936). (c) the Walt Disney Company.*

that makes the gag funnier).

These categories are by no means all-inclusive, and many of the examples shown overlap into other categories. Though the juxtaposition of scenes as a narrative device is mentioned, a valid topic barely covered here is the contribution that a well-timed or edited scene can play in intensifying the action. (Perhaps that will be discussed in their next book!)

But regardless of classification, the artwork is what most makes *Too Funny for Words* worth owning. Stills from the early black-and-white shorts (many by Ub Iwerks) are used to compare the early shorts, in which gags did not need to be performed by a specific character, with the later, more refined shorts and features, in which the situations sprang out of the personalities of the

characters.

Though a judgement against the early (more primitive?) style is implied, Frank and Ollie are not above including some of their own failures. One anecdote even recounts an instance in which Walt was wrong! There are also several sketches and storyboards suggesting scenes that were not used in the final films. All of this aids us in learning how the studio's approach to its characters evolved.

The only negative thing that can be said of *Too Funny For Words* is that it appears meager when weighed against the visually-opulent *Illusion of Life*. But taken as a companion volume, it serves to reinforce one of the best depictions of Disney and his studio. Up until *Illusion of Life*, written accounts of Disney were either unbelievably canonizing or excessively defamatory; Disney was either the only real genius of the cinema, or an exploitative sweatshop boss, both extremes ultimately being equally harmful to his image.

Frank and Ollie can be credited with placing Disney in the proper perspective. Disney, as depicted in their books, was indeed a bit larger than life, an inspired story editor without peer, but a man who worked with a staff of equally-inspired artists who were allowed to exercise many creative decisions. (Most of the illustrations in both books are credited to their artists.)

To the authors, the primary contributing factors to the Disney humor were "Walt's sense of entertainment as interpreted in drawings by an imaginative and skillful staff." This view of Disney and his studio is not only the most realistic one, it is also the most likable one. And for the first time, I can trust that what I am reading is an accurate documentation of the most important studio in animation history.

*David Bastian lives in Cincinnati with "Buck," his animation stand.*



# SHORT SUBJECTS

## *Reviews of Recent Films and Books*

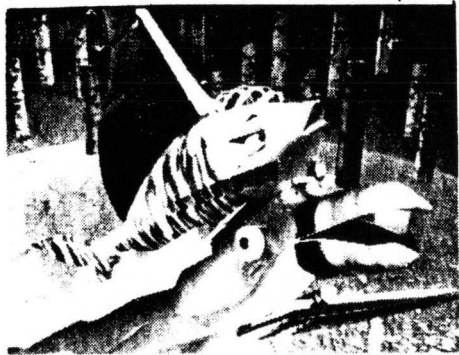
*The Computer Animation Show.* Produced by Terry Thoren.

The problem with computer animation at this point is that it's so hard to make believable characters. The pieces in Expanded Entertainment's *The Computer Animation Show* that sway away from trying to do that are usually the most successful. *Andre and Wally B.*, for instance, is an unsuccessful cartoon because it doesn't really do justice to the characters, who would have been much more expressive and funny if drawn by hand.

The computer cartoons that work the best are those that don't just try to duplicate cel animation. Since computer animation's benefits are the result of its usage of shapes and forms, films that capitalize on this aspect usually turn out the best.

But that is not enough. So much abstract meandering can get tedious. There are less of these kinds of works in *The Computer Animation Show* than have been seen in the past, perhaps a sign that the animators are trying to avoid this tedium. Still, some of the works (Elyse Vaintraub's *Deja Vu* comes to mind) were nice looking but nothing else.

There are also films which used humanoid characters not found in nature to advance the story. The only "real" human character in the show (*Tony De-Peltrie*) doesn't really pull off his believability (the length of that cartoon doesn't help), but other films were more successful with more stylized abstractions of the human form. In *Fairplay*, directed by Michael Sciulli (with character animation by *Animato's* own Mark Marderosian), the "actors" are 3D shapes who cavort around a fair, riding the rides



*Symbolic Graphics and Whitney/Demos Productions's Stanley and Stella: Breaking the Ice. From The Computer Animation Show.*

(including a great roller coaster), getting lost in the crowd, and having meaningless and brief love affairs. The robots in the short *Opera Industrial*, directed by Adam Chin and Richard Cohen at Pacific Data, wander through their factory like rejects from *Metropolis* yet with feeling of their own. The characters in Robert Abel's wonderful *High Fidelity* are merely rotating shapes out of a 50s kitsch nightmare. Steve Segal's *Dance of the Stumblers* was perhaps the most successful in that crude as it was compared to most of the other films, the abstract stick figures carried some personality lacking in the more expensive-looking characters.

Yet all of these films are successful not despite the lack of facial features, but because of that lack. Trying to make computer shapes too "realistic" inevitably leads to a comparison with what can be done with cel animation, and computers still haven't caught up to traditional means for conveying emotion.

Even better is Chris Wedge's work, shown in *Tuber's Two Step* and *Balloon Guy*. Wedge, a student at Ohio State, stays away from the geometric shapes preferred by his fellow computer animators; his characters bounce and spin with great abandon as if made of rubber. Their design reminds me of the animation of Paul Driessen (whose work I also love). Credit also goes to David Haumann who wrote Chris' "flexible body" program.

The most successful computer animation, though, is where the animator takes a normal everyday item and makes it into a believable character. John Lasseter did an excellent job last year with his Academy Award nominated *Luxo, Jr.*, and his newest entry, *Red's Dream*, is even better. Without adding any humanizing characteristic (eyes, mouth, arms), he can make a lamp or a unicycle have great personality. When Red the unicycle finishes his dream and goes back to his corner sadly, the audience gives a collected "awwww." For a unicycle!

Also sort of in this vein is *Oilspot and Lipstick*, a charming piece done after hours by Disney animators under the leadership of Dave English and Michael Cadeno. This even had the story feel of a Disney film - hero saves heroine from trouble against all odds. (Of course; did you expect the female character to save the day in a Disney film?) *Oilspot and Lipstick* are "dogs" made up of spare parts in the junkyard (his head is a vacuum cleaner; she has eggbeaters for ears). In an attempt to make the short feel even more like a traditional cartoon, drawings were used for the backgrounds and outlines were drawn around the characters.

There are many more shorts in the show, since most of the works are only two minutes or so in length (not surprising given the costs of computer animation). The films I've mentioned here I feel are the ones that are on the cutting edge; they're trying to break away from the "oh, look, isn't that interesting" school of computer animation to give us something new. It is nice to see some animators progressing, bit by bit.

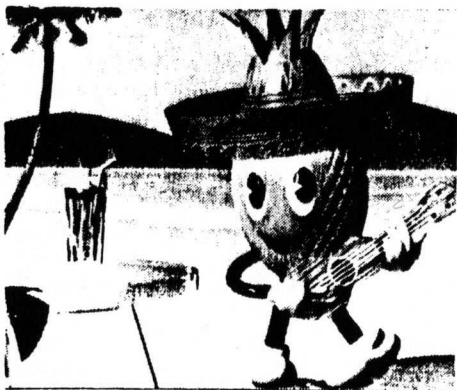
Mike Ventrella

*The Wizard of Speed and Time*. Directed by and starring Mike Jittlov.

We all know that Mike Jittlov is a genius. We've seen his films at science fiction conventions and animation festivals. We know about his not shaking hands and wearing a green jacket. We love all the eccentricities, so we'll forgive him if his first feature, which he wrote, directed, and stars in, is a bit self-indulgent and inconsistent. Of course, those who don't know the legend of Mike Jittlov or haven't seen his short films will probably not enjoy the film as much as the initiated. But that was no problem at this L.A. test screening in late February, since most of the audience were either fans or crew. However, even an unfamiliar audience should find much to like in *The Wizard of Speed and Time*.

Jittlov himself is an extremely likable screen presence, and his character, who is of course himself, is very believable. He skillfully walks a thin line between being a magical person and being a befuddled filmmaker. You can almost believe that Mike Jittlov has magical powers. Sadly, those powers don't seem to be in the areas of directing actors and developing a believable plot. His power lies in coming up with countless little inventive ideas, little snippets of animation and special effects, and high-energy editing. These pluses all come together to make an enjoyable film, but something is decidedly missing. Maybe it's plausible secondary characters, may-

*Peppy the pineapple*. From The Computer Animation Show.



be it's a subplot, or maybe it's a plot.

What plot there is concerns a bet made between a director and his producer that a novice special effects guy (Jittlov) can't possibly do all the special effects required for a television special. The producer hires two thugs to thwart Jittlov's efforts to ensure that the producer wins his bet. The premise of a bet is weak, as are the actors playing these roles. Even weaker are the sequences with the two thugs, who do fake Mexican and Canadian accents and then are featured in one of the worst chase scenes ever put on film.

All this underscores the strengths of the Jittlov character, who brings the film back to an entertaining level after the depths of these awkward scenes. When Mike Jittlov is on the screen, it's hard not to smile just a little, because his bits are funny, unique, or at least visually exciting, and usually all three. Interspersed throughout the film are excerpts from his celebrated shorts, culminating with a reshot version of the fast-running part of the Wizard short.

*The Wizard of Speed and Time* is a tribute to the lure and lore of Hollywood.

It's very entertaining when the star is on screen, and it sinks when he's not. Thank goodness he's on screen most of the time.  
*Steve Segal*

**Count Duckula.** A Cosgrove-Hall production; directed by Chris Randall; narrated by Barry Clayton.

A vegetarian vampire duck who would rather eat BLT sandwiches than sink his teeth into anything bloody? A nanny/housekeeper who is the definitive five-hundred pound canary with a brain to match? A hunchbacked butler with the unlikely name of Igor, who wants to relive the good ol' days of violence and mayhem? All this and more awaits the view of this new British series seen on the Nickelodeon cable channel.

Count Duckula looks like he stepped out of Walt Disney's worst nightmare about Donald Duck and talks like a missing member of Monty Python. With narration that sounds like Vincent Price, and a castle setting that Dracula could love, this show has something for everyone.

Based on a villain that appeared in another Cosgrove-Hall production, *Dan-*

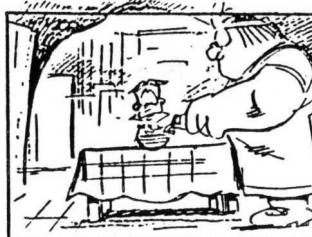
*Part of a Count Duckula storyboard. (c) Cosgrove-Hall Productions.*



DUCKULA - "OH GOOD! THEN SPLASH ME WITH SOME... WAIT!"



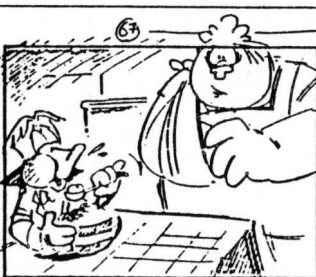
DUCKULA (CONT.) - "SPLASH MY MUSEL WITH SOME MILK PLEASE! PLEASE!"



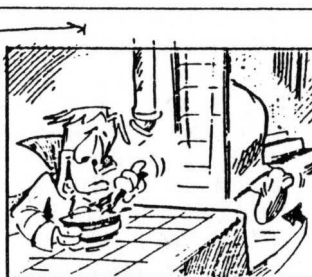
NANNY - "THERE YOU GO."



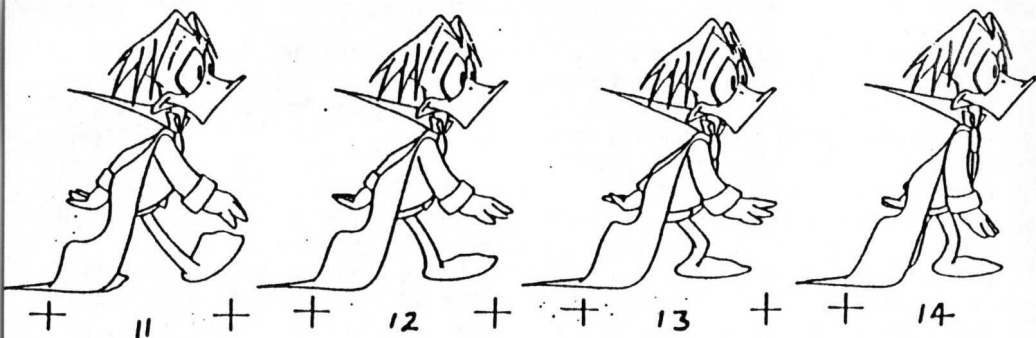
DUCKULA - "OH BOY THIS IS GOOD STUFF! THAT'S THE MILK TASTE KIND OF FUNNY BUT... YUMMY..."



NANNY - "RIGHT TAWN, YOU EAT THAT AND UP LIKE A GOOD COUNT AND ILL GO AND GET ON WITH THE DUTYING."



DUCKULA - "OH, YOU DO THAT (NANNY EXITS)"



A Count Duckula walk cycle. (c) Cosgrove-Hall Productions.

germouse, Count Duckula (who wears a Dangermouse nightshirt to bed) now has adventures of his own. With the help of a transporter machine (a coffin decorated with Christmas lights), he and his companions can travel anywhere. In one episode he visits one of his relatives in Spain, while another time he returns to ancient Egypt to find the mystic saxophone - an instrument that when played gives the owner power over life and death. In that episode, entitled "No Sax Please, We're Egyptian," the writers treat the audience to several conversations that belong in the Abbott and Costello "Who's On First?" Hall of Fame.

*Count Duckula* is the kind of show where the jokes (some good, some not so good) come at the viewer from all directions. Both visual and dialogue gags run rampant, and the best way to catch all the nuances of the show is with a video recorder. This show is definitely a keeper!  
*Don Mohan*

*Light Years.* Directed by Rene LaLux.

Poor Isaac Asimov.

He's a wonderful writer whose work shines with the best of them. So why did he allow himself to be associated with his horrendous film?

It even says so at the beginning, in huge letters: "Issac Asimov Presents," as if that will somehow redeem the thing. In actuality, all Dr. Asimov did is provide an English translation to this French film by Rene LaLux, the director of *Fantastic Planet*.

If you liked the slow, ponderous characters, the stilted and cliched dialogue, and the minimal animation of *Fantastic Planet*, then you should love

*Light Years*, which offers even more of the same.

The story concerns a huge brain that has somehow created a time door that allows it to send people from the present ahead in time to be turned into robots to come back in time to catch more people to make more robots. (Got that?) Apparently, in the future, when this time door was/will be made, the brain (who is called - ready? - Metamorphis! Creative, eh?) needs bodies to replenish its cells which don't reproduce, so he sent these robots back in time to get people, since there are no people in the future. Why? Because robots destroyed them all long ago in the past. (Huh?)

There is the obligatory male hero who speaks of destiny and the obligatory helpless female who falls in love with him instantly (and who never wears a shirt). There's the wise and trusted leader who has bird wings growing out of her head, and a race of twisted deformed people who, of course, have hearts of gold beneath their horrifying exteriors.

No one ever cracks a joke in this world. There is nothing to distinguish one person from any other based on personality. Only someone raised on SatAM superheroes and Japanimation can stomach this junk.

Perhaps if the animation were more expressive I'd be more generous, but despite lovely backgrounds and interesting looking creatures with strange biologies, no one has even as much expressive personality as one of the Happy Clowns of Happytown or whatever they're called.

Too bad we couldn't keep this movie's cels from reproducing. *Mike Ventrella*



## KRICFALUSI INTERVIEW

(Continued from page 13)

*Are you pretty pleased with the reception the show's gotten?*

Critically, yeah. Not so much with the ratings. It's weird, too, because the Nielsens are all screwed up this year. Every kid I talk to loves the show. I can't figure out why the ratings are just kind of average. It's really strange, and I just don't believe that asking 1200 people gives you a real cross-section of America.

But at the same time, there's problems with the show. It should be jam-packed entertainment. There's also those "cheater" cartoons (the compilations of old Terry footage.) Right away, the kids are going to tune out on those. No kid is going to stand for something like that.

*Were those strictly to save on budget?*

Yeah. That was the idea in the beginning, but it turned out we had enough money to do them real anyway. Ralph kept worrying - he's kind of a paranoid about this - he kept worrying that somewhere along the line he was going to make some catastrophic decision that would completely blow the budget. He always wants to put away a lot of money, which handicaps the rest of us on the reality of making these films.

It turned out we did everything on time, on budget, in fact under budget, so we had this money left over. So he blew it

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*The Cow.*



in the post-production, just redoing things over and over again. He'd redo songs for those dumb cheaters. Why waste money on those things? Nobody's going to watch them anyway. Just cut together the best possible footage you can from the old Terrytoons, if you're going to do that. But he'd look at it and say, "Well I don't like it. Let's do it over again." Ralph, it's a cheater! Please put the money into a *real* cartoon!

*Are you optimistic about the future at all?*

Pessimistic and optimistic. It's a weird combination. I have no optimism for Saturday morning. As long as there are networks, there's going to be garbage. In fact, as long as there are other animation studios out there, there's going to be garbage. The only chance is if my crew and I manage to sell something, and continue what we did on *Mighty Mouse*, and not do our mistakes. We're getting better, we're experimenting.

Right now, I've got a bunch of projects that I'm out there pitching. And I pitch them to the networks too, but I don't have much hope for them. There's just too many problems there.

It'll take a little while, but we're going to sell something. In fact, we're pretty close now on a couple of things. It make take doing something really cheap for cable or something like that, like pulling off a *Crusader Rabbit*, just to get something going. But once we do that, then we can hopefully get bigger budgets.

*So you're less worried about a big budget than about having the freedom to do something interesting?*

Oh, definitely. Give me \$100,000 and I'll do a cartoon that might be better than anything anyone else is doing. It's talent and inventiveness, is what it is. The money helps, you like to be able to do something again if you get it wrong or something. You like to do what you should and make it fully animated. But fully animated by itself doesn't make a good cartoon. Like Don Bluth films. It's just a bunch of guys flailing all over the place. What the hell is that? That's not acting. It's full inbetweening.

## FAN MAIL

(Continued from page 5)

all, Dave Tendlar, Al Eugster, Bernie Wolf, and myself all had successful careers in Hollywood, as did Al Giess from the background department. Under the working conditions formulated by Max and Dave it was impossible for anyone to do his or her best work. That is the substance of my evaluation, and I believe all the above men would agree with me.

If you think that the examination of both the positive and negative aspects of a studio's work indicates a basic enmity, then you don't know how to write history. It is only when all factors, good and bad, are presented to the reader, that an accurate picture of a given situation can be understood. Mind you, each historian is going to be writing his personal viewpoint. What is fascinating about reading is the fact that another author evaluating the same factors might come up with quite another type of book.

I certainly stand by my assertion that I knew most of the people involved in the strike. Frank Paiker and I played on the same professional football team and went on to vocational school together. Sadie and Paul Bodin from the ink and paint department were my good friends because we were all Sunday painters. The idea that the animators sat in some kind of ivory tower, separate from the lowly inkers and painters, just isn't so. In Florida, when I asked about the strike, I was talking to my friends. You were interviewing strangers....there is one hell of a difference.

I am glad that you have backed off from your petulant position about my not having given you my best anecdotes for your book. Even so, I still say that as long as you were so obviously angry at my fancied lack of cooperation, ethically you should not have written a review, nor should Joe Adamson, for the same reason. It's not professional.

As for your gleeful accusation that I shouldn't have used Felix the Cat on the cover of my book, if this holds true, none of you people who are now writing, but did not work in the profession,

should use animation characters on your books.

There are more than 400 pages in my book. Instead of writing about the content, here you are happily pointing out that I never worked on Felix the Cat, yet I use him on my cover. If that isn't a case of puerile nit-picking, I don't know what to call it.

It strikes me that it is high time to call a halt to this exchange, because we obviously are not dealing from the same strata.

Shamus Culhane  
New York, NY

Dear Shamus Culhane:

Well Shamus, you're absolutely right. We are speaking from different positions. You speak from the viewpoint of a participant. I speak from the viewpoint of a trained observer.

I look at the story of the Fleischer Studios not just from one viewpoint, as you do, but from the viewpoint of many who worked at the studio. I've interviewed Joe Oriolo, Jack Mercer, Mae Questel, Myron Waldman, Vera Coleman, Al Eugster, Alden Getz, Pauline Commaner, Hal Seeger, John Walworth, Hi Neigher, Edith Vernick, Ruth Kneitel, Grim Natwick, Lanny Riess, Sammy Timburg, and you, Shamus. My friend Ray Pointer has provided me with transcripts of conversations he had with Lou Fleischer, and I've gathered clippings about the studio from 1919 to the present. I've watched hours and hours of Fleischer cartoons, and own many on videotape.

I have been a professional journalist for over ten years; my work has appeared nationally in publications including *USA Today* and *Twilight Zone Magazine*. I work now as the Program Supervisor at a restored Victorian house museum, and I teach children how to preserve the history of their families and communities. I bring these experiences to the project of writing a book on Max Fleischer and his studio. I hope to hear from you when my book is published, Shamus, as I'll value your reactions.

G. Michael Dobbs  
Indian Orchard, MA





Wanted Popeye



Records

From the 1950's  
to late 1960's

Contact: Fred Grandinetti  
96 Edenfield Ave.  
Watertown MA. 02172

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